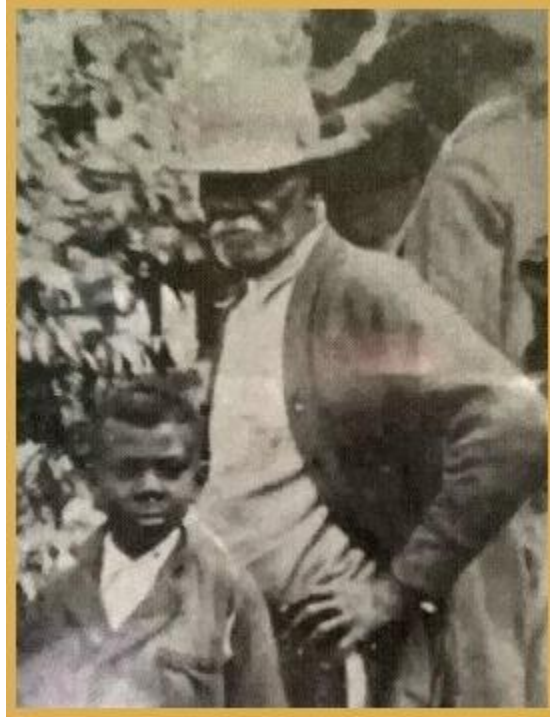
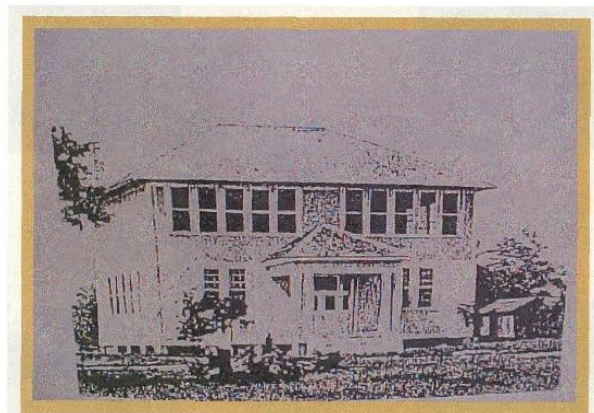


## The History of O.W. Dillon Leadership Academy

Prior to 1910 there is no record of a name for the school for African-Americans in Kentwood. However, the head of the first school was Esaw Lawson.



During this same year money was donated to construct Kentwood Industrial for African-Americans. In 1911 the school was renamed the Tangipahoa Parish Training School. It received a boost during the 1911-1914 period when \$500 was given by the John F. Slater Fund. The school, which was the first for African-Americans in Tangipahoa Parish, was placed in Kentwood after the town of Amite voted against building it there. Mr. Lawson was asked to suggest a principal for the school, and he submitted the name of Oliver Wendell Dillon.



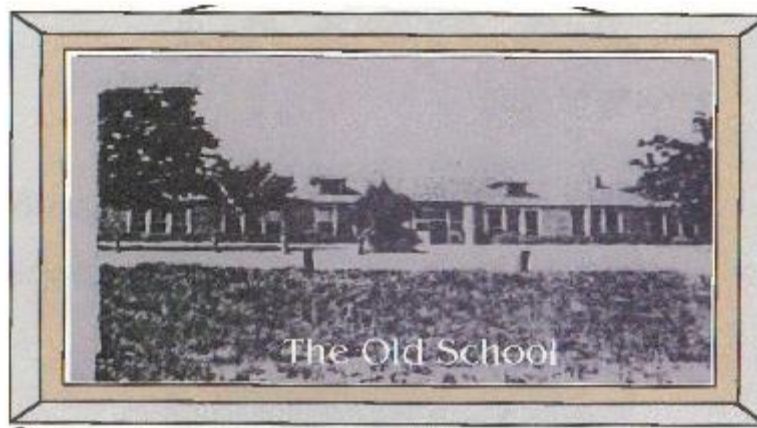
Tangipahoa Parish Training School for the Colored, Kentwood, Louisiana

In 1917 Mr. Oliver Wendell Dillon came to Kentwood to take charge of the one-room, one-teacher, two months a year school. That year Mr. Dillon received \$1,000 from the Brooks Scanlon Lumber Co. and the Natalbany Lumber Co. in order to hire three other teachers and extend the school term to a full nine months for 200 students. In 1919 the school board appropriated \$1,000 to construct a two-story, five-classroom building at the school. Another \$1,200 was spent to purchase 85 acres adjoining the school.



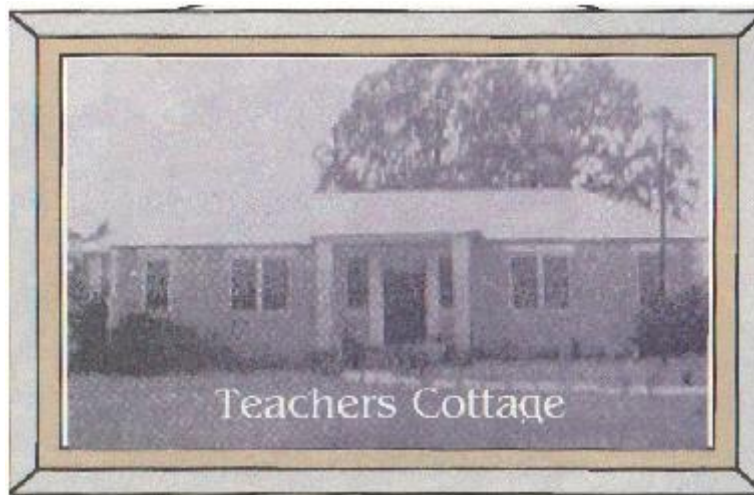
The school for African-Americans in Kentwood was recognized as a state approved high school by 1930. During the 1930's four or five teachers taught at the school. By 1930 there had been twenty-one graduates, and all of those were in the high school's teacher training program. By 1930 there were 102 students at the school. By 1940 attendance averaged 297.

In 1936 the board provided \$2,000 to aid in the construction of additional buildings at the school. Mr. Dillon continued his money raising efforts to match \$5,000 promised by the State Supervisor of Negro Education, which he had accomplished within two days with the assistance of Mr. Wayne and Mr. H.A. Addison. This endeavor resulted in a new building to replace the one that burned as well as the girls and boys dormitories that had also been destroyed by fire.

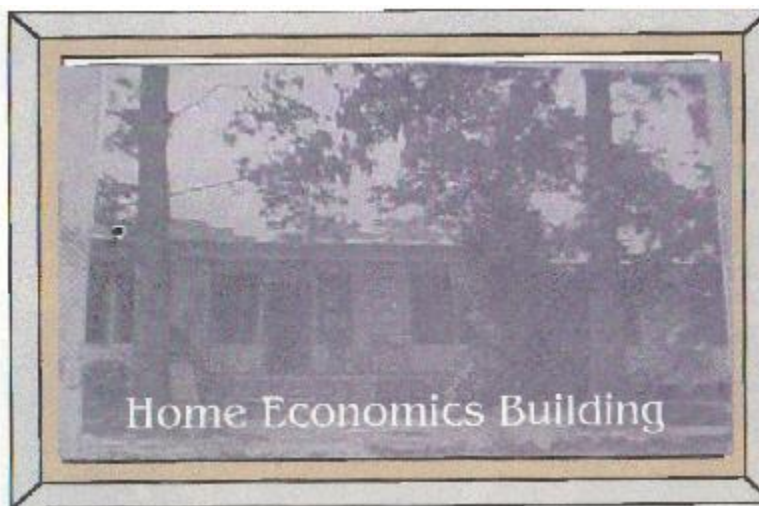


Mr. Dillon appealed to the local board to buy a one-man machine and pay for the millwork to make cement blocks. After securing the machine he implored Negro people in the area to supply labor. They made 40,000 cement blocks, one at a time and erected a building for educating area children.

Mr. Dillon was able to get thirty boys from the National Youth Organization in New Orleans to come to Kentwood and enroll in school. During their stay enough blocks were made to build a teacher's home for faculty members.



The school plan in 1945 consisted of five buildings with fifteen classrooms and an auditorium. The school was located on a ten-acre campus. In 1946, several elementary schools for African-Americans in surrounding areas were closed. These students were then transferred to the Parish Training School.



Mr. Dillon retired on May 17, 1952 at the age of sixty-nine. Mr. Collis B. Temple Sr. became principal after Mr. Dillon's retirement. In 1952 the name of the school was changed to O.W. Dillon High School for Negroes to honor the school's retired principal.



*Mr. & Mrs. C. B. Temple*

As the result of a bond issue in 1953 several new buildings were added and existing buildings re-roofed. Physical education facilities were built in 1968-69. Federal funds were used to build an industrial arts building in 1968. Mr. Temple continued as principal after Dillon High was converted to Kentwood Elementary School in 1969. Mrs. Fochia Varnado Wilson became the next principal.

Source of Information: Tangipahoa Parish Training School/ Dillon Memorial High School Reunion 2003, additional information submitted by Rena Menard.



Subsequent principals (list may be incomplete) include Orene Lee, Lynell Higgenbotham, and Ashley Walker. The school was given a new name to honor the memory of O.W. Dillon, who donated the land for the school's original location, O.W. Dillon Memorial Elementary.

Under the guidance of principal Ashley Walker, a new school building was planned to take the place of the original campus. In 2013, while Mr. Lance Harrell was principal of O.W. Dillon the school was relocated to a brand new facility on the I-55 Service Road. Shortly after the name was changed to O.W. Dillon Leadership Academy. Mr. Hugh Wallace took over as principal in the 2014-15 school year and served as principal for five years. At that time, Ms. Henrietta Vernon, a longtime faculty member at O.W. Dillon became principal, starting with the 2019-2020 school year.

Information to add? Please contact the webmaster.

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